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ABSTRACT

The views of faculty members from postsecondary institutions in California, Utah, and Nevada regarding the impact of field-based courses in the humanities and social sciences as necessary to perform effectively, indicated problems frequently encountered during such courses, and recommended ideas to help others implement field-based courses. The open-ended responses of 65 instructors regarding skills required to teach the course tended to cluster under: subject matter expertise, developing community contact, interpersonal skills, learning facilitation techniques, and real-world experience. Responses of 51 instructors concerning faculty attitudes were varied but suggest that interpersonal skills, willingness to work with field site personnel, possession of a number of learning facilitation techniques (for both groups and individuals), and a philosophical commitment to the use of community-based experiences are important prerequisites to successful programs. The problems cited by 55 instructors were both personal and institutional. Although a wide range of problems was mentioned, time involved in performing the various tasks associated with community-based activities was the most frequently mentioned problem. A departmental philosophy that emphasized research over teaching or that viewed classroom learning as more valuable was cited as a problem. Instructors also reported that courses undergo many changes in response to outside factors, including community opportunities and student needs. (SW)

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Integrating The Community and the Classroom: Implementing at the Postsecondary Level

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Abstract

Successful use of community-based learning activities to augment classroom-based activities of postsecondary courses depends primarily on the instructor's knowledge, skill, philosophical commitment to such practices, and the ability to anticipate various implementation problems and requirements that often arise. This report gives the results of individual interviews with instructors of a wide range of social science and humanities courses who have included community-based learning activities as part of their course design. The results are summarized directly from the conversations with instructors.

Integrating the Community and the Classroom:
Implementing at the Postsecondary Level

INTRODUCTION

The value of offering students a chance to practice their skills or to apply their classroom learning in the community with planned learning activities is well documented. Claims are routinely made that community or field-based learning activities allow students to relate theory to practice by testing ideas in "real world" settings; offer them a chance to experience the conditions of a workplace; help them clarify their career goals; and offer an opportunity to perform a community service in an environment that aids the student's academic and personal growth. These are some of the beneficial outcomes for students who experience community-based activities. But what are the benefits and the costs for the instructor who plans, organizes, and implements such external-to-the-classroom learning activities?

The study of issues related to implementation has been part of a program of research conducted at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development on the use of community-based learning activities in postsecondary courses. The research has been focused primarily on the teaching and learning activities of social science and humanities courses. Three study objectives have guided this research: (1) To describe postsecondary courses in the humanities and social sciences that include a non-classroom learning component; (2) To identify factors that impede or facilitate the implementation of community-based components that augment or reinforce classroom-based learning activities; and (3) To identify and define key conditions and characteristics of community-based learning activities that contribute to quality learning experiences and to the development of employability competencies of the students who participate.

Work on the first study objective has been completed. Information obtained from interviews with instructors at selected colleges and universities in California, Nevada, and Utah resulted in detailed descriptions of more than 80 postsecondary courses.[1] The entries provide information about the demographics of the course and the goals, structure, and process of both classroom and community-based learning activities. This report, also based on interviews with instructors, focuses on the second study objective--the identification of factors that impede or facilitate implementation.

STUDY RESULTS

The interviews were intended to obtain information in two areas: (1) to identify the skills, attitudes and resources instructors perceived as necessary to perform effectively and (2) to identify problems frequently encountered during such courses and to elicit recommendations or suggestions that would assist others in the implementation process. The sections that follow are organized around each of these information areas.

SKILLS, ATTITUDES, AND RESOURCES

Information on skills, attitudes, and resources was obtained through the use of open-ended questions. As a results, a wide diversity of responses was given.

What Skills Are Required To Teach The Course? Sixty-five instructors were queried about required skills to teach courses with a community-based component. Their responses tended to cluster under (1) subject matter expertise, (2) developing community contacts, (3) interpersonal skills, (4) learning facilitation techniques, and (5) "real-world" experience. Though these are listed in order of frequency, most instructors responded with two or more types of skills. Figure 1 summarizes the responses given most often.

Subject Matter Expertise. Thirty of the interviewees cited subject matter expertise as a requirement. It is likely that many others considered subject matter knowledge as a "given" and therefore not an issue. However, in several cases the subject matter claimed as necessary involved a specialized knowledge of an area related to but not traditionally covered in the course (e.g., knowledge of publishing for an English course or museum management for a history course). In a few cases, interviewees cited knowledge requirements in areas not directly related to the course content (e.g., photography skills for an archaelogy course).

Developing Community Contacts. The ability to develop and maintain community contacts was mentioned by 22 instructors. The use of resource persons, guest lecturers, or intern supervisors is frequently part of the instructional process and these persons are usually recruited and monitored by the instructor. Specifically, it was recommended that instructors have a "familiarity with," "working knowledge of" or "involvement with" various agencies, institutions, or individual professionals in the community where placements might occur. A few respondents stressed that "this [contact] is an ongoing process" in that good supervision, community relations, and developing new resources are constant issues.

Interpersonal Skills. The third area represents a clustering of various interpersonal skills mentioned, such as counseling, group dynamics, communications, problem-solving with students, and the ability "to relate well to students" and to "remove personal barriers." Several instructors used the word "facilitation" to describe the teaching style best suited for this type of course. Communication and problem-solving skills are needed for working with students individually, and in groups, and also for maintaining good relationships with professionals in the community. Five instructors mentioned the importance of supervisory skills to "monitor the students' placement experiences" and to "make sure that student commitments are kept."

Learning Facilitation. Interviewees cited several learning facilitation techniques as being helpful in organizing and conducting a course with community-based components. Among them were the ability to develop personalized learning plans, make use of a variety of monitoring techniques, and to help the student to integrate classroom and non-classroom learning experiences.

Real World Experiences. Ten instructors recommended that in addition to knowing about community sites, faculty have some practical experience in the professional arena outside the university. This, it was felt, would increase their understanding of what happens in the field and would be useful in helping students make connections between theory and practice. Figure 1 summarizes the finding regarding faculty skills.

FIGURE 1

FACULTY SKILLS REQUIRED

Subject matter expertise	• own subject area • related areas
Making community contacts	• placement sites development and maintenance • coordinating with community
Interpersonal skills	• counseling • group dynamics • communications • problem-solving • facilitation • supervision of students
Learning facilitation techniques	• help students abstract from experience to theory • help students connect academic work with community experiences • work in loosely structured classroom setting • match student skills and interests to site activities • make use of the journal plan activities and set goal objectives • supervise and monitor students
Real world experience	• professional experience outside the university

What Kinds of Faculty Attitudes Are Needed? Of the 51 instructors asked about faculty attitudes needed for successful use of community-based learning activities, 46 offered a wide range of personal traits and values. These responses are categorized below.

Personal traits: Patience; personal courage; mental agility; openness; tolerance; interest in bureaucracy; flexibility; understanding; dedication; interest in community; tactfulness; able to trust students and supervisors.

Philosophical commitment to:

• experience-based learning	16
• student growth	10
• integration of theory & practice	5
• career exploration for student	2
• learning how to learn	1

Willingess to:

• spend additional time	5
• try alternatives	1
• study content areas of non-expertise	1
• see the agency's perspective	1

Is More Instructor Time Required? The responses to the questions of instructor time indicated that adding planned community-based learning acties to the course requires more time. The majority of the instructors (66%) saw it as time consuming with much of the extra time spent in student conferences and in follow-up with the field sites. However, a few of these added that most of the additional preparation time was needed only the first time the course was taught. Seventeen percent of the instructors felt that the flexible and interactive nature of seminar-based classroom activities resulted in no more preparation time being required than their other courses.

A categorization of the responses to the "time" question follows:

Is More Time required?

42	yes
11	no
4	"about the same"
3	no response
1	"hard to say"
1	"most expensive course on campus"
1	"more follow-up"

Total of 63 responses: 66% yes; 17% no; 17% other

If yes, to do what?

24	individualized consultation
15	preparation
21	follow-up
10	record keeping
7	other: 5 site contact
	2 read journals

An issue closely related to the time question was the relationship between time spent (a resource cost) and perceived benefits for the instructors. Clearly the majority felt that the benefits outweighed the costs. Of the 53 responses to the question of how they would rate the "cost" vs. the "benefits", the responses were as follows:

38	benefits far outweigh costs
0	benefits somewhat outweigh costs
6	costs equal the benefits
7	costs somewhat outweigh the benefits
2	costs far outweigh the benefits

Summary of Skills, Attitudes, and Resources. Regarding those skills the instructors identified, it may be that with the exception of developing and maintaining community contacts, they simply represent good teaching skills equally desirable for all instructors regardless of the course design. However, some of the process skills (i.e., interpersonal skills and learning facilitation techniques) will be needed more often when there is a community-based component. This is particularly true when the instructor attempts to individualize the course content according to learner interests and needs. The responses imply that there is more openness involved with such courses (e.g., contacts with the community, availability to students, willingness to take a few pedagogical risks). Though some mentioned the need for additional resources, such as money, transportation costs, and teaching assistants, responses most often focused on the importance of personal traits, such as initiative, patience, and flexibility.

PROBLEMS AND EFFECTS ON COURSES

The second study objective concerns instructors' perceptions of major problems they have encountered in implementing community-based learning activities. They were asked to identify some effects on the courses or changes they had to institute because of the community-based component. Their responses have been classified below under general headings of problems associated with this kind of course organization, obstacles to the use of community-based activities in other courses in the department or institution, and changes made in the course.

What Problems Have Been Encountered? Of the 60 instructors responding to the issue of problems associated with community-based learning courses, only five reported that there were "no problems" in teaching their courses. The other 55 responses were distributed among 38 different "problems." Again, the interviewer provided no sample responses; all the problems that the instructors cited were formulated in their own words. They represent a broad base for further inquiry into the identified "problem areas." That is, these responses could be the basis for shaping categories of problems that could then be submitted to a second, larger sample of instructors who could select and rank order them. Responding to the "given" problems would encourage instructors to consider each problem in relation to the others and reduce the likelihood of their focusing only on the most current or the most persistent problem.

The most frequently mentioned problem was that of time, which reiterates the instructors' previous concern about the time and energy required to teach courses with field-based activities. They reported that the time is spent in setting up and monitoring field sites and in more personal involvement with students. In fact, these teacher activities are prominently listed among the "problems" of teaching field-based courses.

The following list of problems identified by the instructors is in order of frequency of response. All were mentioned more than once.

- Time
- Follow-up: monitoring fieldwork
- Getting good sites

- Requires more energy
- Requires more personal involvement with students
- Financial
- Lack of administrative support
- Motivating bored students
- Motivating good relations with supervisors
- Travel
- Large class
- Getting grants
- Setting up logistics

The following problems were mentioned only once:

- Dealing with irresponsible students
- Keeping students and agencies happy
- Coordination
- Getting students to participate
- An objective or quantifiable evaluation
- Not getting into a rut
- Integrating this with other courses
- Counseling out inappropriately assigned students
- Stress associated with responsiblity for program
- Declining student interest in subject matter
- Risk that students may not respond to non-teaching
- Integrating the reading
- Representing the university
- Keeping good relations with the rest of the department
- Not enough student interns to fill the placements
- Need to limit the number of students so each has a quality experience

What Are The Obstacles in Department or Institution for More Such Courses?

Forty-seven instructors responded to this question. Seven said no more field-based courses were needed in their department; seven others said there were no obstacles to having more courses; and two said they did not know. The remaining 31 instructors divided their responses among 20 different obstacles, none of which were suggested by the interviewers. Those mentioned by more than one instructor are listed here in the order of their frequency:

- Departmental philosophy
- Lack of time
- Additional staff needed
- Lack of administrative support
- Educating students to the value of the experience

The departmental philosophies described as impediments to field-based courses include those that emphasize research over teaching, those

that feel that "more academic endeavors are needed," or that "only classroom learning is valuable." The additional staff needed represented not only faculty but also teaching assistants and field study coordinators. The concern was that lack of adequate staff resulted in inadequate supervision of the field-based component.

The instructors mentioned the following items only once:

- Site facilities are inadequate for more students
- Lack of uniform content in different experiences
- Supervision time requirements
- Need to trust students
- Very specialized content
- Need more students
- Need a more academic setting
- Other instructors resent the amount of student time
- Lack of faculty motivation or interest

What Changes Have Been Made in the Course? Fifty-five instructors were asked what changes, if any, they have made in their courses. Ten reported that no changes had been made in their courses, and two said they did not know of any changes. The remaining 43 instructors reported a wide variety of changes were made (78% of the sample). Some of the changes were administrative in character (e.g., change to pass/fail; increase the number of units; change from an Independent Study listing), but most had to do with an attempt on their part to improve the structure or process of the course (e.g., include more indepth experience at the agency; increase the instructor/supervisor contact, add more agencies).

A few changes were mentioned by more than one instructor, but for the most part the changes were specific to the nature of the individual course, and no pattern of change was evident. Course changes that were mentioned more than once include:

- More students enrolled
- More agencies added
- Evaluation process revised
- Less written work required
- Preparation component (orientation or workshop) added
- Became more formalized, more structured
- Became more individualized

One conclusion can be drawn from the variety of responses that while the type of change required may not be predictable, the instructor

should be prepared to accommodate some replanning or revision of the course both in the first year and in subsequent years.

Summary of Problems and Effects on Courses. The problems that the instructors cited were both personal and institutional. A wide range of problems was mentioned, and almost every instructor gave one or more. Though time involved in performing the various tasks associated with community-based activities was the most frequently mentioned problem, the wide variety suggests that the problems are most often unique to the institution and the community rather than to the use of community-based learning activities.

With regard to increasing the number of course offerings with a community-based component, the major obstacle reported was a departmental philosophy that emphasized research over teaching or that viewed classroom-learning as more valuable.

Almost without exception, instructors reported that their courses undergo many changes in response to outside factors (e.g., community wants and opportunities, availability of placements, student needs). Thus, an instructor should expect that regardless of how well the course is designed some changes will be needed in content or the teaching/learning process.

CONCLUSION

Because most of the interview questions were open-ended, the responses received were quite varied and certainly reflect the uniqueness of individual instructors and their institutions. This is not surprising, since the phenomenon (community-based learning to augment classroom learning) is itself highly amenable to individual teaching styles and preferences and also responsive, indeed vulnerable, to local conditions.

The diversity of the responses to the interview questions was consistent with the exploratory intent of the study. It might be informative to use the identified categories as a basis for a follow-up inquiry addressed to a similar but larger sample. Instructors could be asked to

rank order the skills and traits to obtain a validated profile of teacher attitudes and competencies for making use of community-based learning activities in postsecondary courses.

The data obtained regarding teacher skills and attitudes also suggest some general directions for instructors who are considering using the community in a planned learning experience. For example, personal working styles and preferences of the instructor may be the most important factors to consider in determining whether to initiate a community-based component as part of the course structure. Findings from the study suggest that interpersonal skills, willingness to work with field site personnel, possession of a number of learning facilitation techniques (for both groups and individuals), and a philosophical commitment to the use of community-based experiences are important prerequisites to successful programs.

In planning a course, it is important to make realistic appraisal of local conditions or characteristics that might affect efforts. It is also useful to talk to other instructors, and contact professional organizations made up of instructors who make use of community-based activities, field internships, and similar resources.* Because of the complexity of implementation and operation, the construction of a workable checklist to serve as a reminder of important tasks will be useful.

Because the instructors reported such vast differences, it is not practical to suggest specific guidelines for implementation. But perhaps the basic ingredients could be summarized as (1) a need for a philosophical commitment to the process; (2) the availability of field contacts, a logistical plan, and support; and (3) a mechanism for monitoring student progress at field sites and integrating these experiences with didactic learning.

*Cf., Council for Advancement of Experiential Education, Lakefront North, Suite 300, Columbia, MD 21044, and National Society for Internship and Experiential Education, 1735 Eye St., Suite 601, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

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EDUCATION, WORK AND PRODUCTIVITY

This publication is a product of the Laboratory's Department of Education, Work and Productivity. The mission of the Department is to improve the preparation of individuals to deal with the complex and changing conditions they face in trying to achieve a life of productive activity and personal fulfillment. The social sciences have documented the compelling reality of such problems as unemployment and underemployment, declining growth in productivity, inequities of employment practices, job dissatisfaction, mid-life career and job changes, and the changing character of work. The Department addresses such issues through research, translation of findings into practical educational applications, and through technical assistance to educators and others who share our concerns.

The Education, Work and Productivity Department is one of six established by the Laboratory's Board of Directors in 1978, and focuses on four program priorities: (1) Preparing youth for transition to adulthood; (2) Understanding the consequences of our changing economic context; (3) understanding individual and societal needs for satisfaction and productivity; and (4) Understanding adult transitions and their effects on satisfaction and productivity. These priorities help shape the ongoing programs and projects of the Department, and guide the Laboratory in its search for resources and support.

Most of the Department's current programs and projects deal with the youth-to-adulthood transition, with emphasis on employability and its development. All of its programs seek improved linkage between educational and employing institutions. Programs designed to improve school practice are patterned after the Far West Laboratory model of Experience-Based Career Education (EBCE), developed in the early 1970s with funding from the National Institute of Education. In EBCE, youth engage in non-paid individualized learning projects at work sites, with guidance, help and encouragement from adult volunteers at the site. Members of the school staff monitor and coordinate community-based learning activities with the rest of the youth's school program to ensure completion of graduation requirements. The outcomes include greater awareness of career options and improved work maturity.

EBCE has been adapted for programs operated by CETA Prime Sponsors and community-based organizations. In these, the learning project may lead not to high school course credits, but rather to the building of an experience portfolio for use in obtaining a job. Programs of experience-based learning have also been developed for postsecondary institutions, using liberal arts courses as the context in which adult students plan and carry out projects that combine career exploration with real-life application of academic subject matter.

These programs have been installed in communities nationwide, and the Department staff has conducted related research on how such programs can help various special populations find meaningful roles in the adult working world. These include the use of experience-based learning processes with the handicapped, ethnic minorities, delinquent youth, and women re-entering the job market.

The Department also engages in policy-related research on such employment and productivity problems as the changing work ethic, the characteristics of employability, the development of work maturity, and the role of the adult mentor in the workplace.

Inquiries about the work and products of the Department are welcome and should be addressed to:

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